

Wildlife Feel the Brunt of Too Many Horses

Keeping too many wild horses on the range can adversely affect many native wildlife species, including the following:



Bighorn sheep must compete for food and water with horses. As horse populations in the Calico Complex continue to increase, bighorn lamb numbers have been well below normal in recent years.



Sage-grouse, a candidate for federally threatened status, depend on healthy and productive lands for food and protection from predators—they are affected when horse numbers get too high. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will decide whether to list the sage-grouse as early as February. The Sage-Grouse Conservation Plans developed for northwestern Nevada have identified horses as one risk factor to critical sage-grouse habitat.



Pronghorn antelope have difficulty competing with horses more than 5 times their size for forbs, grasses and access to desert water. The Nevada Department of Wildlife has received numerous complaints from hunters in the Calico Mountains, who had observed horses chasing and harassing pronghorn near water sources.



Mule deer must compete with horses for food and water. Their numbers are declining alarmingly.



The Calico Complex includes 11 recovery streams for threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout. Many of the streams where reintroduction of the trout has already occurred are in jeopardy due to impacts from horses. Some reintroduction efforts have been postponed until habitat conditions improve.



Nevada's Calico Mountains are starkly beautiful, but they're not lush. Too many horses can drastically reduce what limited forage exists for all wildlife.



Riparian areas are the lifeblood of arid landscapes. These are complex systems where invertebrates, birds, fish and mammals are all interconnected and depend on healthy, watered landscapes for their survival. On the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, just north of the Calico Complex, where cattle have been removed since 1994, horses have damaged healthy springs, seeps and other riparian areas, destroying the rich biological community on which so many species depend.



All creatures depend on a healthy landscape—horses, native wildlife, plants and people. We must come together to find balanced solutions to manage our beautiful yet fragile public lands.

All photos are available for media use. Please contact Brian Beffort at (775) 324-7667.